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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

January 6, 2012

The Honorable John D. Rockefeller IV
Chairman
The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate

The Honorable John L. Mica
Chairman
The Honorable Nick J. Rahall, II
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
House of Representatives

Subject: *National Transportation Safety Board's Implementation of GAO Recommendations*

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigates every civil aviation accident in the United States and selected accidents involving other transportation modes, determines the probable causes of these accidents, makes recommendations to address safety issues identified during accident investigations, performs transportation safety studies, and operates a Training Center for NTSB investigators and other transportation safety professionals. NTSB is a relatively small federal agency with about 400 staff and a fiscal year 2011 budget of about \$98 million. From 2006 through 2008, we made 21 recommendations to NTSB aimed at improving its management, information technology, accident investigation criteria, safety studies, and Training Center use. In January 2010, we reported that NTSB had fully implemented 9 of our 21 recommendations and made significant progress in implementing the remaining 12 recommendations.¹ NTSB's 2006 reauthorization legislation included language that called for us to annually evaluate NTSB's programs, operations, and activities.² As agreed with your committees, this report evaluates NTSB's progress in implementing our remaining 12 recommendations as of December 2011.

To determine the status of NTSB's implementation of our remaining 12 recommendations, we reviewed and analyzed documents obtained from NTSB since January 2010 on the actions NTSB officials have taken to address our recommendations. We also spoke with NTSB officials about these actions.

¹GAO, *National Transportation Safety Board: Issues Related to the 2010 Reauthorization*, [GAO-10-366T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 27, 2010).

²The National Transportation Safety Board Reauthorization Act of 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-443, § 5, 120 Stat. 3297, 3299, adding § 1138 to title 49 U.S.C.

We conducted this performance audit from October 2011 to January 2012 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

NTSB Has Implemented All of Our Recommendations Made Since 2006

NTSB has fully implemented all of the 21 recommendations we have made to the agency since 2006. After assessing NTSB's progress since our 2010 report, we conclude that NTSB has now fully implemented the 12 recommendations not previously closed.

Among the actions NTSB took since January 2010 are the following:

- developed a strategic training plan that is aligned with its revised strategic plan,
- established a diversity task force and management development programs to address diversity management issues,
- deployed an agencywide document management system that improved the efficiency of its process for closing recommendations,
- implemented an accounting system that tracks the amount of time employees spend on each investigation to allow better management of agency resources, and
- limited users' ability to load software or modify NTSB workstations to reduce risk to NTSB computers and internal network.

All 21 recommendations and their implementation status are listed in figure 1.

Figure 1: Implementation Status of GAO's Recommendations to NTSB, as of December 2011

Area	GAO recommendation	Status in 2010	Status as of December 2011	
Communication	Develop mechanisms to facilitate communication from staff to management.	●	n/a	
	Report to Congress on the status of GAO recommendations.	●	n/a	
Strategic planning	Develop a revised strategic plan that follows performance-based practices.	●	n/a	
Information technology (IT)	Develop an IT plan that includes policies and a strategy to guide IT acquisitions.	●	n/a	
	Encrypt information/data on all laptops and mobile devices.	●	n/a	
	Limit local administrator privileges to those accounts that require that level of access.	◐	●	
Knowledge management	Develop a knowledge management plan to create, capture, and reuse knowledge to achieve agency objectives.	◐	●	
Organizational structure	Align organizational structure to implement strategic plan.	●	n/a	
	Eliminate unnecessary management layers.	◐	●	
Human capital management	Develop a strategic human capital plan that is linked to the agency's overall strategic plan. The human capital plan should include strategies on staffing, recruitment and retention, training, and diversity management.	◐	●	
Training	Develop a strategic training plan that is aligned with the revised strategic plan, identifies skill gaps that pose obstacles to meeting the agency's strategic goals, and establishes curriculum that would eliminate those gaps.	◐	●	
	Develop a core curriculum for investigators that addresses the specialized needs for each mode.	◐	●	
	Maximize the delivery of core investigator curriculum at the Training Center.	◐	●	
	Develop plans to increase utilization of the Training Center.	●	n/a	
Financial management	Correct violation of the Antideficiency Act related to purchasing accident insurance for employees on official travel.	●	n/a	
	Correct violation of the Antideficiency Act related to NTSB's lease of the Training Center.	◐	●	
	Develop a full cost accounting system to track time employees spend on each investigation and in training.	◐	●	
Accident selection	Develop agency orders for all modes articulating risk-based criteria for selecting which accidents to investigate.	●	n/a	
Recommendation close-out	Computerize related documentation and use concurrent reviews.	◐	●	
Report development	Identify better practices in the agency and apply them to all modes.	◐	●	
Safety studies	Increase use of safety studies.	◐	●	
		◐ Significant progress	● Fully implemented	n/a No change in status (already fully implemented by 2010)

Sources: GAO and analysis of NTSB data.

Agency Comments

We provided NTSB a draft copy of this report for review and comment and we received written comments from the Chairman of NTSB, which are reprinted in enclosure I. In its written comments, NTSB agreed with our characterization of the progress it had made in implementing our recommendations.

We are sending copies of this report to the Chairman of NTSB, other congressional committees, and interested parties. In addition, this report will be available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staffs have any questions regarding this report, please contact me at (202) 512-2834 or dillinghamg@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report were Cathy Colwell (Assistant Director), Andy Clinton, Fred Evans, Bert Japikse, Elizabeth Eisenstadt, Mary Marshall, Sara Ann Moessbauer, Travis Thomson, and Jack Warner.



Gerald L. Dillingham, Ph. D.
Director, Physical Infrastructure Issues

Enclosure

Enclosure I: Comments from the National Transportation Safety Board



Office of the Chairman

National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

DEC 19 2011

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro: 

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your draft report, *National Transportation Safety Board's Implementation of Government Accountability Office Recommendations* (GAO-12-306R).

We agree with your assessments (1) that the NTSB has fully implemented all of the 21 recommendations that the GAO has made to the NTSB since 2006 and (2) that we have fully implemented the 12 recommendations not previously closed since the GAO 2010 report.

We appreciate the constructive working relationship that we have developed with the GAO and would like to thank Dr. Dillingham and the GAO Physical Infrastructure Team who have worked diligently on our engagements. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. David Mayer, NTSB Managing Director, at (202) 314-6060.

Sincerely,



Deborah A.P. Hersman
Chairman

(540236)

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